

Home on the Job

Telecommuting
in the
Alberta
Government



Home on the Job



Telecommuting in the Alberta Government

Home on the Job is written for line managers, human resources people and employees who are considering, or are already involved in, telecommuting. It incorporates the Alberta government's Telecommuting Guidelines, but it also answers frequently asked questions and gives tips on making telecommuting work. It will help a manager decide if this is a good option from a business point of view and help an employee decide if telecommuting is the right choice for him/her.

To obtain additional copies of this guide, contact:

Staffing and Workforce Adjustment
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What is Telecommuting?

The "tele" part of the term refers to the communications technology that makes this work option possible. Most employees who work from home get their assignments and turn in finished work using the various electronic connections they have to the primary workplace: telephone, fax machine, and a personal computer that is linked to office systems by modem. In this way, the work, not the employee, travels to and from the office.

Telecommuting for one or more days a week is one of the options available within the Alberta government to give employees flexibility in balancing home and work responsibilities. Other options already successfully implemented within the Alberta government include part-time work, job sharing, and flex time.



How Telecommuting Pays

For the employer, being able to offer flexible work arrangements helps them attract and retain valuable employees, even in a competitive job market.

A d d i n g u p t h e b e n e f i t s

A number of studies have been done on telecommuting in other parts of North America, and have concluded increases in productivity, job satisfaction, and other quality measures.

In Canada, the Royal Bank Financial Group did a survey of their flexible work arrangements, which include telecommuting. Of the 1,700 participants in the study, half were involved in flexible work arrangements, and the other half were their managers and co-workers. Flexible work arrangements led to improvement in all of the categories of productivity and employee satisfaction measured.

Most employees reported an increase or improvement in their ability to

- Manage work and life (balancing responsibilities).
- Reduce stress.
- Increase energy levels.

Managers reported an increase or improvement in

- Customer service and satisfaction.

Many people enjoy working from home, and find their home office is a relaxed and comfortable place to work, with fewer distractions.

Telecommuting is attractive to many employees. It allows them to work independently, adjusting their work schedules to suit their personal commitments. They save commuting time, and reduce their personal spending on such work-related expenses as transportation, parking, lunches, and office wear.

Many people enjoy working from home, and find their home office is a relaxed and comfortable place to work, with fewer distractions. There is less stress, and they often feel more energetic and get more done. Most research on telecommuting has reported higher productivity from telecommuting workers. This combination of increased job satisfaction and higher productivity in turn leads to improved customer service and satisfaction.

Because telecommuting can reduce stress, it contributes to employee wellness, including fewer days missed because of stress-related illness. Parents working from home can more easily deal with a short-term family problem without time lost from work. Occasionally, an older child with the flu can be home with the working parent, for example, if the child is resting or playing independently. (Telecommuting employees are required, however, to have long-term dependent care arrangements in place. Working from home cannot be a substitute for childcare or elder care.)

- Job performance (99 per cent of managers reported performance improved or remained the same).
- Reduced absenteeism.

The Royal Bank Financial Group study concluded that the success of flexible work arrangements depends on "supportive managers, co-operative co-workers, good communication between co-workers... and a supportive organizational culture."

In an AT&T survey, 71 per cent of telecommuting workers reported higher job satisfaction. This survey found that working at home "allows employees to accomplish more, with less stress" and to sustain these performance gains over time. Among the 36,000 AT&T employees who worked from home in the study year, 76 per cent reported increased productivity (which they attributed to fewer interruptions)

and 74 per cent reported a positive effect on their personal lives.

In a Washington Post survey, information technology employees listed the option of telecommuting as their first choice among all possible "perks" they would like their employers to provide. (Bonuses were fifth and higher salaries were seventh.)



Although telecommuting involves many different people, the employee and manager are the two main players.

What Will it Take to Make it Work?

Although telecommuting involves many different people, the employee and manager are the two main players. The arrangement is off to a good start if they fit these profiles:

The manager

- I am willing to try new ways of doing things.
- I can trust my employees to get the work done, even if I cannot see them doing it.
- I feel it is important for a manager to help employees achieve a balance between their professional and personal responsibilities.
- In this department, people are open to part-time work, job sharing, and other flexible work arrangements.

The employee

- I have strong organizational and time management skills. I will be able to set and meet my own deadlines and maintain regular work routines at home.
- I have enough experience to understand the job requirements and department policies and procedures. I know who to call for information or advice.
- I can keep to a schedule that meets both my professional and personal responsibilities.
- I am motivated and self-disciplined, and I get the work done even when no one is watching.

The manager's evaluation of a telecommuting proposal focuses on three areas: the work, the employee, and the home office.

What the manager must think about

Managers decide whether a telecommuting arrangement is feasible. If they approve a telecommuting arrangement, they provide support, guidance, and ongoing evaluation.

They must consider the type of work being done, and the services being provided to clients.

- What business advantages are there for the employer? Will telecommuting increase productivity or make better use of resources? There may be an advantage to accessing central computers off peak times, for example.
- Will it help solve problems or create opportunities? For example, will offering the option of telecommuting help you retain staff with "hot skills," or allow you to focus on and complete long-term work projects?
- What are the work responsibilities? Are there enough tasks that can be done at home? Is it work that would benefit from quiet or uninterrupted time? Can the employee control and schedule the workflow, or is it very dependent on others? Some examples of work commonly found in telecommuting arrangements are writing, reading, telephoning, research, analysis, planning, data entry, and word processing.
- What are the end results of the work? Does the worker have specific and clearly defined tasks with measurable output? Can you manage performance by looking at the quality, quantity, and timeliness of the completed work?
- Have you carefully evaluated the performance and work habits of the employee?
- Is there a low need for face-to-face communication? Can meetings be scheduled on specified days of the week? Can telephone, voice mail, or e-mail be used to keep in touch on telecommuting days? What strategies are in place, or could be set up, to ensure effective communication?



In considering a telecommuting proposal, the manager reviews what the employee is planning for the home office and the connections to the workplace.

- Is there a separate area in the home that can be designated as a workspace? Is it a safe, comfortable environment? The employee may already have a personal computer and software at home that they want to use, or the department may have surplus equipment that can be taken home—this can be worked out with the manager, employee, and departmental systems area. (*See Appendix 2: Telecommuting Requirements Checklist.*)
- Does the home workspace meet the department's occupational health and safety requirements? Some common areas to check are lighting, ergonomics, and electrical considerations. (*See Appendix 3: Home Office Safety Checklist.*)
- Depending on the type of work done, security and confidentiality of information can be an issue. The department's systems area can set up the necessary computer network security. The employee will need to take whatever other precautions are necessary to protect the privacy of information (locked file cabinets and password-protected files, for example).

W h a t a r e t h e c h a l l e n g e s ?

***Telecommuting is an alternative
that can work well for everyone
involved—the employer, the
employee, co-workers, and clients—
but there are challenges.***

Some employees find they need the structure of an office and a clearly scheduled workday. Without regular breaks and quitting time, some people find they work such long hours that working from home is even more stressful because it takes over their home lives. Some others have trouble getting

started and sticking to the job at home, so that they are missing deadlines, or scrambling at the last minute.

Co-workers may be envious or feel hampered in their own work when a member of the team is off-site.

Managers have reported challenges in scheduling meetings and training, workload management, and facilitating co-operation among co-workers. All of these, however, can be addressed with good planning and communication, so that all the parties know what to expect.



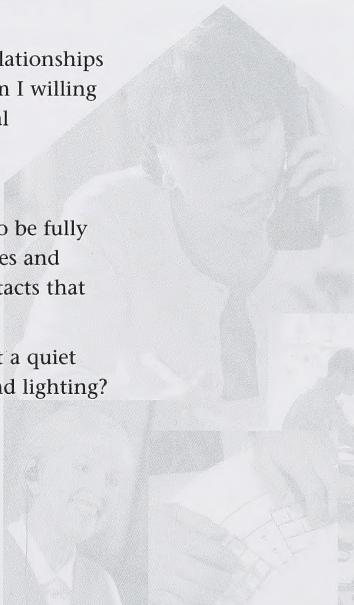
The employees' evaluation of their own suitability to telecommuting focuses on three areas: the work, the home office, and their personal work habits, needs, and values.

What the employee must think about

Employees are responsible for initiating the process. If they are interested in telecommuting and they think the work they do is suitable, they submit a proposal to their manager. If a telecommuting arrangement is approved, the employee provides a home office workspace that meets department requirements. Throughout the arrangement, maintaining satisfactory job performance is the employee's responsibility.

In considering whether a telecommuting arrangement will work for them, employees need to ask themselves

- If I have family responsibilities during the workday, can I arrange care for my parents or children so I can work?
- Do I have excellent communication skills? Do I keep my co-workers and manager informed? Do I make sure I am accessible to clients? Will I be able to set up channels to maintain effective communication both from the office and home?
- Am I adaptable and responsive? Do I have good working relationships with co-workers and clients? How will I maintain them? Am I willing to adjust my schedule and come into the office on a normal telecommuting day if necessary?
- Am I comfortable working alone?
- Do I have enough experience in the job and organization to be fully familiar with job requirements and the departmental policies and procedures? Have I worked there long enough to build contacts that will support telecommuting?
- Do I have room for a designated office space? Can I make it a quiet working space with safe and comfortable office furniture and lighting? (See Appendix 3: Home Office Safety Checklist.)





The Proposal

If you have decided you would like to try telecommuting, these steps will get you started.

First, talk to your manager. You will already have thought about what the impact would be on your work, co-workers, and clients—and how you could make it work for your department and yourself. Share this information with your manager, and find out what his/her thoughts and concerns are about telecommuting.

If you are a bargaining unit employee, contact your union representative and let them know you are interested in participating in a telecommuting arrangement.

Next, you should share your interest and plans with your co-workers. Discuss how the arrangement would affect them, and what you are willing to do to make sure it does not cause problems for your team. How will you make sure it will not make extra work for them, and how will you keep in touch?

If you are a bargaining unit employee, contact your union representative and let them know you are interested in participating in a telecommuting arrangement.

You may want to propose an initial trial period, so both you and your manager can evaluate the success of the arrangement.

Making the proposal

Now you are ready to develop and submit a written proposal to your manager. Include the following:

- What are the advantages to you and to the others you work with?
- What work will you be doing at home? Why is the work suited to telecommuting?
- What skills do you have to ensure success?
- What will you do to maintain or improve productivity?
- How will the arrangement affect you, your co-workers, and clients (workflow, meetings, and communication, for example)?
- What work schedule are you proposing? How many days will you be in the office? What will your hours of work be?
- How will you maintain effective communication? What equipment will you need? How and when will you check in? How and when can your supervisor, co-workers, and clients get in touch with you?
- What will you do to set up your home office?
- If you need dependent care, will you be able to make arrangements that leave you free for work?

You may want to propose an initial trial period, so both you and your manager can evaluate the success of the arrangement.

The topics in the *Telecommuting Agreement* may also help you develop your own proposal.



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The Agreement

As the manager, you are responsible for evaluating the proposal, and then setting up an agreement that works for all parties. Typically, this will be your role:

- Review the proposal. As the manager, you are responsible for the effectiveness of your area. Not all jobs and/or people are suitable for a telecommuting arrangement. The approval process requires specific focus on three dimensions: the work, the employee, and the home workspace.
- Review the *Telecommuting Guidelines*—they provide basic eligibility and approval criteria, including legal and safety issues.
- Discuss the proposal with the employee. Raise any questions or concerns you have, and give your employee the opportunity to address any issues.
- Discuss the proposal with all your staff. Make sure they have the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings about how it will affect the team and how the work can be managed. Answer any questions they might have about telecommuting in general—one proposal may lead to interest from other staff members.
- Make the initial decision on the feasibility of a telecommuting arrangement, and work with all parties necessary to finalize an arrangement (human resources office, union for bargaining unit employees, department head). A written telecommuting agreement clarifies understandings and expectations, and records the agreement of all parties. Refer to the *Telecommuting Agreement*—it can serve as a template and be tailored to meet your specific situation.

Clearly define the performance expectations and focus on the results expected, rather than the activities or processes used.

Managing performance

No matter where your employee works, you will need to work together to manage performance. Clearly define the performance expectations and focus on the results expected, rather than the activities or processes used. Then evaluate how well, and how promptly, the employee has delivered the work products previously agreed on. You might want to set up some checkpoints to monitor progress. Think of yourself as a leader, coach, and resource for your staff.

Evaluate the telecommuting arrangement itself. Look at organizational effectiveness, employee wellness, and client service as well as the effect it will have on your ability to keep a valued employee.





Telecommuting can give the Alberta government an edge in hiring and retaining valuable employees.

Frequently Asked Questions

Managers want to know

Are there benefits for the employer?

Telecommuting can give the Alberta government an edge in hiring and retaining valuable employees. It is particularly attractive to people with particular needs and responsibilities, such as disabled persons, parents, or those who live a long distance from work sites. Research shows that telecommuting can increase employee satisfaction and wellness, which leads to improved productivity and customer satisfaction.

There can also be more tangible and long-term benefits. When a significant number of employees relocate off-site, there may be savings in overhead, including reduced need for office space and parking.

Who can participate?

After one year of service, all permanent full-time and part-time employees are eligible to propose a telecommuting arrangement.

Managers may also consider employees with less service and, in some circumstances, wage, temporary, and contract employees may also be eligible.

Who needs to be involved?

There are many parties affected by a telecommuting agreement: the manager, employee, co-workers, clients, the human resources office in your department, the department head, and the union for bargaining unit employees. Systems and occupational health & safety people will also need to offer their expertise.

Keep a positive attitude towards telecommuting, and be open to new ideas and different ways of doing things.

What can I do to make the arrangement a success?

Keep a positive attitude towards telecommuting, and be open to new ideas and different ways of doing things. Managing a telecommuting employee is much like managing on-site employees: you will be most successful with a results-oriented management style. Consider how you will measure an individual's performance whenever you consider a proposal for telecommuting.

- Review employee proposals and consider whether a telecommuting arrangement would work in each case. Involve all parties necessary to reach a final decision.
- Provide support and guidance to employees who wish to propose, or who are participating in, a telecommuting arrangement. Make it easy for clients and members of the work team to communicate with the employee working from home.
- Make sure employees understand departmental policies and procedures (for example, privacy and security).
- Make sure the necessary equipment and connections are in place and that the work environment is safe (*see Appendix 3 for our Home Office Safety Checklist*).
- Work with the employee to set up performance management plans. Provide timely and constructive comments.
- Work with all the parties involved to evaluate the success of the telecommuting arrangement.

What if I decide not to accept a proposal?

Not all jobs or people are suitable for telecommuting arrangements. Management is responsible for the final decision, and it cannot be appealed. If you have to turn down a proposal, discuss the business or policy reasons with the employee.

If you find an employee is unsuitable, discuss any competencies the employee could work on and consider re-evaluating the proposal later.



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What if I get more requests from employees than I can accommodate?

Try to accommodate as many proposals as you can. If the number is unmanageable, try involving all employees in identifying what is workable for the unit. Maybe it is possible to rotate the telecommuting opportunity.

Do we need a formal agreement?

A formal agreement is required when the candidate is a bargaining unit employee and works at home regularly. For others, it is strongly suggested that you capture the terms of the telecommuting agreement in written form. (*See Appendix 4 for the Telecommuting Agreement.*)

If you have a situation in which the employee is not working from home regularly, or if the employee is not a member of the bargaining unit, it is up to your department whether the arrangement will be formal or informal.

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working at home
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How do I manage people I don't see?

Managers need to think of themselves as leaders, coaches, and resources for their staff. You need to have trust in an employee's abilities and judgment. Clearly define the performance expectations and focus on the results you expect, rather than the activities or processes used. You also need to make sure communication strategies are effective. Employees working at home may be out of sight, but they should not be out of touch.





If you have responsibilities at home, this flexible schedule can help you balance work and family.

Employees want to know

How can telecommuting help me?

Telecommuting lets you set a flexible schedule, working during the time of day that is most productive for you, in a quiet, comfortable environment that should be less stressful and less distracting than a busy office. If you have responsibilities at home, this flexible schedule can help you balance work and family.

Less time on the road means more time for work and for being active at home and in the community. When you work at home, you may spend less on transportation, work clothes, and lunches.

Who can participate?

After one year of service, all permanent full-time and part-time employees are eligible to propose a telecommuting arrangement.

Managers may also consider employees with less service and, in some circumstances, wage, temporary, and contract employees may also be eligible.

Who needs to be involved?

There are many parties affected by a telecommuting agreement—the manager, employee, co-workers, clients, the human resources office in your department, and the department head, and for bargaining unit employees, the union. Systems and occupational health & safety people will also need to offer their expertise.

Success begins
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What can I do to make the arrangement a success?

Success begins with a well-thought-out proposal. Consider whether your working style and the work you do are well suited to telecommuting. Reading this booklet and the government's *Telecommuting Guidelines* can help you decide. Ask your human resources office for other background reading.

If the proposal is accepted, there is a lot you can do to make the arrangement a success. You can

- Set up a realistic performance plan and work schedule so that you can sustain or improve your productivity.
- Arrange for any regular dependent care you need so that you can work in a distraction-free environment.
- Make sure your workspace has the equipment and connections you need, and is safe. (*See page 36 for our Home Office Safety Checklist.*)
- Comply with departmental policies and procedures, such as privacy and security of information.

There may be some costs involved in setting up your home office—every situation is unique. Refer to the *Telecommuting Guidelines* in Appendix 1 to see what needs to be considered, and who pays.

My manager has asked me to consider telecommuting. Do I have to participate?

No. Telecommuting is strictly voluntary and must be agreed to by both employee and manager.



What if my child is home ill on one of the telecommuting days?

Take a family illness day unless you are sure you can complete your work (if the child is resting quietly, for example, or you can have someone come in to be with him/her).

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Will telecommuting hurt my chances for promotions or other job changes?

No. You will continue to manage your career as usual. If an opportunity comes up that is not compatible with telecommuting, you will need to decide at that time what is best for you.

What if I am transferred to a new position?

Your telecommuting arrangement would be automatically terminated. If you want a telecommuting arrangement in your new job, you will need to start the approval process all over again and sign a new agreement.



And more...

Will a telecommuting arrangement affect benefit entitlements?

No. Employment status, benefits, and entitlements are not altered by a telecommuting arrangement.

How are things like attendance recording, overtime, and casual illness handled?

They are administered in the same manner as for an employee who is not telecommuting. Each department may have slightly different processes. Check with your human resources office for more information.

Can the telecommuting schedule be changed?

Probably—as long as business needs are met, and the required total number of hours are worked. It would need to be discussed and agreed to by all the parties.

Employees are expected to be flexible and responsive to business needs.

Employees are covered by Workers' Compensation for work-related accidents.

What if an employee is called into the office on one of their telecommuting days?

Employees are expected to be flexible and responsive to business needs. Their travel time will be recognized as part of the workday, but they will not be paid for mileage.

What if an employee gets hurt while working at home?

Employees are covered by Workers' Compensation for work-related accidents. To be work-related, an accident must "arise out of" and "occur in the course of" employment. This would normally include breaks and having lunch at home. The WCB will decide each case according to the specific circumstances surrounding it. All incidents must be immediately reported to the supervisor. An investigation is then conducted using the same criteria that are applied to any workplace injury.

Can government-owned equipment be used for personal purposes?

The employing department's policies and standards on personal use of hardware and software provided by government will apply in the home environment. Use your judgment in each situation.

What if government equipment is damaged or lost?

The government's insurance will cover it as long as the employee was not negligent and took reasonable precautions to secure and protect the property. For more information on coverage, contact your department's insurance representative.

What happens if my computer crashes while I am working at home?

You would have access to the same help desk services as any other employee. If an equipment problem continues, get in touch with your supervisor to work out a solution.

Plan for regular evaluations of the success of the arrangement, and be prepared for change.

What if an arrangement is not working?

This can happen. Working at home might no longer suit an employee, or a manager may have business reasons for becoming dissatisfied with a telecommuting arrangement. Some employees find they need the formality and interaction of an office setting to do their best work.

Plan for regular evaluations of the success of the arrangement, and be prepared for change. Either party can cancel the arrangement with 30 days' written notice, or earlier if they both agree.

Where can I get more information?

The Telecommuting Resources section of *Home on the Job* lists a number of publications, web sites and videos that were available at the time of publication. New research is done all the time. Contact your human resources office for the most up-to-date resource they have or can get for you.

At Home on the Job: two stories

To illustrate some of the challenges and advantages of telecommuting, we have created two Alberta Government employees, "Eric" and "Cathy." Although the characters and their situations are fictional, the ways they have chosen to use telecommuting are found within the Telecommuting Guidelines.



Eric's Story

Eric works in the correspondence unit in one of the largest Alberta Government departments. Over the past several years, as the technology for communications within the government has developed, he has found that he spends most of his days at his computer, and his job requires fewer face-to-face meetings than it once did.

He is part of a team in the correspondence unit, where all team members have about the same degree of independence. They meet briefly Wednesday and Friday mornings to discuss difficult situations and to compare notes on new information sources.

Eric receives letters from the public and from professional clients, researches the appropriate information, drafts a reply and sends it to his supervisor, who then makes comments and asks for revisions and further research as needed and arranges for approvals and signatures so it can be mailed.

For frequently asked questions, Eric can use standard-form replies, editing them as needed. More often, he uses the telephone or e-mail to get the information he needs from department staff, and drafts an original reply. For other matters, Eric has access to the government's subscriptions to a range of online journals. He also regularly contacts university and public libraries through their online research desks. Eric's duties also include a lot of reading, as he is expected to keep up on developments in the department and the profession it serves.

He talked the situation over with Brian, his supervisor, and found him open to the idea of a telecommuting arrangement that would allow Eric to work from home three days a week.

Eric does not mind that much of his routine is self-directed and that he works so much on his own. His job performance reviews have always been excellent, and he likes his job.

But Eric and his wife Amy have three school-age children and he wishes he could be home earlier for the kids in the afternoon. Their younger daughter has a learning disability, and he and his wife take turns doing paired reading and playing word and number games with her, which takes an hour or more each day. The two older children play volleyball and basketball, sometimes after school.

Eric finds the competing demands on his time stressful, and has considered leaving government and working from home doing contract work, as he knows his skills and experience make him valuable in both the public and private sectors.

He talked the situation over with Brian, his supervisor, and found him open to the idea of a telecommuting arrangement that would allow Eric to work from home three days a week. In his proposal to his supervisor, he offered to use his own home office and equipment, and worked with the department's Systems Support group so he could be connected into the office and get access to all the files and resources he now uses at work. Brian is a bargaining unit employee, so his union representative reviewed the telecommuting agreement before it was signed.

Brian and his supervisor used the checklists in *Home on the Job* to help ensure the home office was safe and efficient.

They start next week on a six-month trial of the arrangement. Eric plans to begin at 7:30 am on his at-home days, getting some writing out of the way in the quiet hour before he begins to make and receive phone calls. He will finish each afternoon at 3:00 pm, in time to pick up the children from school and take them to any games or appointments they have.

Both Brian and Eric are optimistic about the success of this telecommuting arrangement. Brian thinks Eric's workload and independent style are well suited to telecommuting, and he is confident that his department can keep Eric on staff by allowing him to balance home and family responsibilities.

Brian thinks Eric's workload and independent style are well suited to telecommuting.



The quiet atmosphere and the flexibility she has arranged for her hours of work on telecommuting days has allowed her to be more productive.

Cathy's Story

Cathy has been working from home two days a week for three years. She works in information technology, developing and maintaining complex interactive web sites for her department and for four of its client agencies.

Cathy has established a home office with government-owned equipment that connects her to the web sites and provides a quiet, distraction-free space. The hardware and software are the same in both offices, but the quiet atmosphere and the flexibility she has arranged for her hours of work on telecommuting days has allowed her to be more productive.

Her telecommuting agreement includes an ongoing assessment of productivity, including the number of "webmaster" inquiries fielded, turnaround time on updates to the sites, client satisfaction, and other measures. Soon after she began working from home, she was made responsible for the fourth agency site. Because she is more efficient working at home, she had no trouble taking the extra responsibility, and enjoys the challenge.

Although Cathy does not have family responsibilities, one of the reasons she proposed a telecommuting arrangement was her running schedule. What began as a fitness activity has become an absorbing part of her life.

"At one time, I was so frustrated by my training and work schedules that I felt I was shortchanging both," Cathy says. "In the winter, I took a longer lunch break to get my run done in daylight. Of course, I worked later those days, but I felt guilty being out of the office so long, anyway. My supervisor in those days had to see all his people at their desks for exactly the number of minutes they were supposed to be putting in, or he thought they were slackers. I often worked until six or so in the evening, but because he wasn't there to see it, it didn't happen."

Soon afterward, Cathy began reporting to a new supervisor whose management style was quite different. Cathy's performance appraisals

Her telecommuting agreement includes an ongoing assessment of productivity.

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continued to be excellent, and her work seemed well suited to the home office, so he was open to the idea of a telecommuting arrangement when Cathy approached him. "I think if the telecommuting opportunity had not become available when my new boss arrived, I would have either given up competitive running, or tried to find another job to get more control over my time."

With her IT skills, Cathy is often asked to apply for jobs in the private sector. But the flexibility the department has shown has won her loyalty. Cathy feels her life is in balance now. She sustains a good job performance record and enjoys good working relationships with management and with her clients and co-workers. She has a satisfying record in her sport and likes the friendships and personal satisfaction she gets from her volunteer work.

At first, Cathy would try to work without regular breaks, and often worked late into the evening. But her supervisor had encouraged her to set a realistic work schedule and within a few weeks, she learned to pace herself sensibly. Now she works steadily from 8:00 until 11:30. She takes half an hour for a sandwich around 11:30 and gets changed for her run at 1:30. She is back to work by 4:00 and works through until about 6:30 on Tuesdays, but Thursdays she goes to the Boys' and Girls' Club after her own run, meeting her young athletes at the club at 3:15. They're finished by 5:00, and after an early supper, Cathy logs back onto her computer and works from 6:30 to 9:00 pm.

"It works for me," Cathy says. "This training schedule is much healthier and I also feel that I am more effective in my work than ever because my work and home life are in balance."

Cathy's supervisor has a results-oriented management style, and he is impressed with Cathy's productivity, despite (or because of) her unusual workday routine.

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routine.*



Telecommuting Resources

Home on the Job is intended to give managers and employees the basic information they need about how telecommuting works in the Alberta government. The *Telecommuting Guidelines* (Appendix 1), the *Telecommuting Requirements Checklist* (Appendix 2) and *Home Office Safety Checklist* (Appendix 3) will help both parties plan for success. The *Telecommuting Agreement* (Appendix 4) sets out the responsibilities of each of the parties to an agreement.

The human resources office in your department can answer questions specific to your situation and department.

They can also arrange to provide you with publications and videos on telecommuting, including a video called *The Keys to Telecommuting Success* and a series of workbooks and videos from the Oregon Office of Energy.

The Web is a rich source of information on telecommuting, working from home, and setting up a home office. Managers will find current data on the success of pilot projects and ongoing telecommuting systems as well as useful advice on management strategies. Begin at the PAO website (www.gov.ab.ca/pao).

The official magazine of the International Telework Association & Council is *Telecommute Magazine*, a monthly publication with articles directed at both managers and telecommuters. For information, contact www.telecommutemagazine.com.

The AT&T survey referred to on page 3 is found at www.att.com. Their *Telework Guide* is at www.att.com/ehs/telework. *The Washington Post* survey is found at www.ivc.ca/wpost.htm.

A very detailed telecommuting guide drawn from the experience in the Silicon Valley area of California is found at www.svi.org/PROJECTS/TCOMMUTE/TCGUIDE/HTMLVERS/tcg1.html

A Canadian perspective is available at www.ivc.ca, the home page of the Canadian Telework Association, which has links to other Canadian sites and periodicals.

Appendix 1: Telecommuting Guidelines of the Government of Alberta

Eligibility

- All permanent full-time and part-time employees are eligible to be considered for a telecommuting arrangement after one year of service with the Alberta government. Employees with less service may be considered in exceptional circumstances (hard-to-recruit positions, for example).
- Eligibility of wage, temporary, and contract employees is at the discretion of the manager.
- Bargaining unit employees must have the approval of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees to participate.
- Participation is voluntary and mutually agreed to by the employee and the supervisor/manager through a written agreement.
- The employing department has the sole right to determine if telecommuting arrangements are operationally feasible.
- When an employee transfers to a new position, the arrangement is automatically terminated and a new agreement must be agreed to by the new supervisor/manager and the employee.

Criteria for Approval

While each proposal is assessed on its own merit, the following overriding conditions must be met:

- The arrangement is operationally feasible and provides a mutual benefit.
- Service and productivity are maintained or improved.

- The tangible and intangible benefits are sufficient to justify any costs: as a general guide, flexible work place arrangements should not result in an increase in the overall operating costs to the department.
- Co-worker concerns can be addressed in an equitable manner.
- Home office facilities are adequate.
- The employee's performance is fully satisfactory.
- The employee demonstrates work habits supportive of successful telecommuting.

Employee Status and Benefits

- An employee's status, responsibilities, benefits, entitlements, and access to organizational information, services, and opportunities are not altered by a telecommuting arrangement.
- Salary, advancement and employee benefits such as statutory holidays, staff development, recognition awards, overtime, access to sick days or other leaves, and parking are administered in the same manner as for an employee who is not telecommuting.

Hours of Work/Overtime

- Hours of work schedules may vary from one telecommuter to another, to allow flexibility in scheduling and meeting both personal and professional commitments.
- Where core work hours are established, they must be stated in the telecommuting agreement.
- Flexible work place arrangements may be combined with flexible or modified hours of work. For bargaining unit employees, these arrangements must be in accordance with Supplement III in the Master Agreement.
- Telecommuting has no impact on an employee's eligibility to be compensated for authorized overtime hours.

Office Days

- Normally, an employee would not work more than three days each week at home, but flexibility is permitted to accommodate different situations. Setting a minimum number of office days required is strongly recommended.
- Office day requirements may be specifically identified or scheduled as needed. Meetings with clients should be scheduled on these office days.
- The employee is expected to reasonably accommodate meetings and other unscheduled events requiring attendance at the office.

On-Site Office

- On-site office space requirements will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
- On-site office needs may be scaled down or shared.

Home Office

Location

- The home office must be a designated space with furnishings that are appropriate to the nature of the work.
- The majority of work should occur in the designated space although the location may change for specific tasks.

Safety

- The employee is responsible for ensuring that the home office meets the department's normal workplace occupational health & safety requirements.
- A home office safety checklist (Appendix 3) must be completed by the employee and submitted with the written agreement.

- All work-related accidents must be promptly reported to the supervisor.
- For personal safety reasons, appointments and meetings with work-related visitors must not be conducted in the home office.
- The employing department should include telecommuting work arrangements in their Occupational Health & Safety program.

Workers' Compensation

- Telecommuting employees are covered for injuries arising out of and in the course of their employment, including work in their homes.
- There must be a relationship between employment expectations and the time and place the accident occurs.
- Each case is judged on its own merits using the same general criteria that are applied to any workplace injury.

On-site Visits

- The home office must be accessible for on-site visits by departmental personnel for safety inspections, accident investigations, equipment audits, and other business-related matters.
- For bargaining unit employees, joint visits with Alberta Union of Provincial Employees representatives may be required.
- Reasonable notice of 24 hours, or less if agreed to by the employee, must be provided for on-site visits.

Home Renovations

- Costs associated with home renovations required for a home office, including physical installation of telephone lines and electrical upgrades, are the responsibility of the employee.

Zoning Regulations

- The employee is responsible for checking into and satisfying local zoning regulations or by-laws concerning setting up a home office.

Tax Implications

- Some home office expenses may be deductible for tax purposes if certain conditions are met. The employee is advised to contact Revenue Canada, as this is a matter between the individual employee and Revenue Canada.

Insurance

- A telecommuter is required to carry a minimum of \$1,000,000 of general liability insurance and inform the insurance company that he/she is working from home; any additional costs are the responsibility of the employee.
- The Government of Alberta's insurance covers loss of or damage to equipment provided by the government, subject to a per loss deductible which is the responsibility of each department. This does not cover equipment owned by the employee.
- The Government of Alberta's insurance also extends to liability arising out of the conduct of business.
- The employer will not be liable for loss or damage to the employer's property where the employee has failed to take reasonable precautions to secure and protect the property.

Family Responsibilities

- Regular dependent care arrangements must be in place to allow the employee to work in a distraction-free environment.

Equipment and Furniture

Ownership

- The employee will provide suitable furniture necessary to work at home.
- Office equipment normally needed by the telecommuter to meet business needs will be provided by the employing department.
- The employing department's policy on personal use of government equipment and software will apply in the home environment.
- Existing office equipment may be transferred to the employee's home if that is workable.
- The use of employee-owned equipment and software must be approved by the employing department.
- Any new hardware or software purchased by the employing department for a telecommuting arrangement must be in keeping with departmental standards and approved through the normal acquisition procedures.
- All equipment and furniture provided by government must be itemized in the telecommuting agreement.

Technical Support

- For equipment and software provided by the Government, the employing department will provide the service necessary for the installation, upgrading, maintenance and removal of hardware, software, virus protection, and peripheral equipment.
- The telecommuting employee is responsible for installing and maintaining approved hardware and software that he/she owns. Virus protection must be included.
- Based on department and employee needs, an employee working at home will have access to the same "help desk" services as any other employee.

Costs and Expenses

- The employing department will supply or pay all reasonable costs and service charges associated with the work performed at home, e.g., phone line, internet (e-mail), office supplies, courier, business-related long distance calls and network hook-up.
- All office-related expenses must be pre-authorized.
- Cost to the employer for equipment and furniture will be assessed on a case-by-case basis as part of the approval process.
- The employing department will normally assume costs for modems and devices required for security purposes.
- Duplicate equipment costs would not normally be supported.
- The employee is responsible for the cost of utilities in the home and for the cost of any trips to the office. If an employee is called in to the office on one of their “home” workdays, their travel time is recognized as part of their workday, but mileage is not paid.

Security/Confidentiality

- All employees must comply with the *Alberta Public Service Code of Conduct and Ethics* and the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* regarding information privacy and security.
- The employing department will ensure computer network security.
- The employee will provide reasonable security for work information as agreed to with the supervisor.

Communications

- The employing department will provide access to the department's communication system, including e-mail and a telephone line as needed.
- The employee is responsible for maintaining effective communication and workflow among clients, co-workers, and the supervisor, including regular checks to office voice mail and e-mail as applicable.

Work Performance and Measurement

- A description of duties typically performed at the home office should be included in the telecommuting agreement.
- Performance expectations for work performed at home should be incorporated into the employee's regular performance management plan. Expectations should be specific and focused on measurable results, not process.
- Performance standards should not change because of where the work is performed.
- A telecommuting employee should be evaluated on individual as well as group work and receive the same performance format as is used on-site.

Telecommuting Agreement

- Details of the telecommuting arrangement must be outlined in a written agreement signed by the employee, the employer, and AUPE for bargaining unit employees. (See Appendix 4.)
- The agreement must include a termination clause that provides for the termination of the arrangement by either party on 30 days written notice or earlier, by mutual agreement.
- The department Human Resource Office must be involved in the preparation of the telecommuting agreement and provided with a signed copy.
- The approval process, terms, or termination of a telecommuting agreement are not subject to the grievance procedure for bargaining unit employees.

Appendix 2: Telecommuting Requirements Checklist

The following checklist identifies items that should be considered when setting up a home office.

Administrative

- Evaluate suitability of candidate and job functions
- Agree on core hours
- Sign telecommuting agreement
- Evaluate performance continually
- Prepare a loaned equipment inventory and sign-out form

Home Office

- Designated work space is suitable for the work to be done
- Furniture meets department standards (ergonomics)
- Lighting meets department standards
- Sensitive information can be safeguarded
- County/municipality approval has been obtained, if required
- Employee has household liability insurance (a minimum of \$1,000,000)

Equipment

Home office includes the following equipment, and all are suitable for the work that is to be done:

- Computer, monitor, hard disk space, and removable disk media
- Help desk contact
- Data/fax modem
- Surge protection or UPS device including fax/modem protection
- Portable data storage device (Zip drive, tape drive, removable hard drive)
- Printer (paper size, print quality, color, graphics)
- Scanner (size, resolution)
- Typewriter, if appropriate
- Special needs equipment (due to disability or medical problem)

Data

Arrangements have been made for access to data between the home office and the principal workplace, including

- Data security needs (access to remote data as well as locally stored data)
- FOIP considerations
- System and data backup hardware, software and procedures
- Disaster recovery procedures
- Hardcopy information security

Software

Needed applications are locally installed and software licensing and upgrade requirements are met, according to department standards, including

- Interface software for mainframe application access
- E-mail
- Virus scanning
- Network access software
- Internet software
- Help desk contact for software support

Communications

- Suitable data modem
- Mainframe access
- Hard-copy phone lists
- E-mail lists
- Dial-up access to email/file/application servers
- Dial-up access security
- Data communication phone line or alternative (cable, dedicated data line)
- Adequate data access speed
- Internet access
- Answering machine or service
- FAX machine
- FAX line
- Call forwarding feature
- Voice mail
- Conference calls
- Call waiting
- Three-way calling
- Calling card
- Pager
- Cellular phone

Daily Work Requirements

- On-line or hard-copy documentation
- Training for equipment/software/procedures
- Daily activity record/report
- Rules of conduct/ethics
- Data backup procedures

Appendix 3:

Home Office Safety Checklist

Home Office Safety Checklist

Telecommuting in the
Alberta Government



Location:			
Date:	Inspected by:		
Supervisor's Review:	Signature:		
Human Resources Review:	Signature:		

Category	Yes	No	Action Required	Completion Date
A. WORKPLACE CONDITIONS				
1. Floors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Free of trip, slip, fall hazards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Free of protrusions, loose tiles, or carpets.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
2. Aisles, Walkways	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Clear and unobstructed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
3. Stairs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Clear and unobstructed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Tread and edgings slip resistant.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Railing provided and in good condition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
4. Exits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Clear and unobstructed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Outside landings, walkways clean (snow and ice).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
5. Lighting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Walking/working areas adequately illuminated.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Light fixtures in good condition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
6. Ergonomics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Are proper ergonomic furniture/principles used?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Are proper lifting methods used?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
B. STORAGE				
1. Storage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Adequate shelving available.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Shelving secured.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Material properly stacked (heavy material on bottom) and is it stable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
C. EQUIPMENT/FURNISHINGS				
1. Equipment Condition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ In good repair.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Properly located.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
2. Furnishings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ File cabinets secure and loaded from bottom drawer to top drawer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ No broken areas on desks, chairs, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ No unsafe practices—drawers open, objects on floor, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
D. ELECTRICAL				
1. Power cords in good condition—no exposed wires, not frayed or with cracked plugs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
2. Three-pronged plugs used where required.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
3. Cords properly placed or secured to prevent tripping.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
4. Adequate number of outlets provided. No overloading outlets with too many plugs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
E. EMERGENCY SYSTEMS				
1. First Aid	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ #2 kits provided.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Adequately stocked—first aid kits.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Treatment recorded in record book.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
2. Fire Extinguishers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
■ Properly mounted, inspection date noted and signed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
F. GENERAL FACILITY				
1. Employees work in a safe manner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
2. Good housekeeping and sanitary practices in washrooms and kitchens.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Appendix 4: Alberta Government Telecommuting Agreement

Telecommuting Agreement

Telecommuting in the
Alberta Government



Agreement dated this: _____ day of _____

between (the employee): _____

and (the department): _____

Effective: _____

The department and the Employee agree as follows:

Telecommuting Tasks:

1. The Employee shall perform the following typical tasks at the home office:

Schedule

2. a) The Employee's normal work week will consist of:

- i) _____ as regular office days
- ii) _____ as home office days

The above schedule may be altered by mutual agreement of the Employee and the Employee's Supervisor.

3. (Optional) Core hours shall be: _____

Employee Status and Benefits

4. The Employee's status, eligibility for authorized overtime, obligations, benefits and entitlements are not altered by this agreement.

Home Office

5. The home office location of the Employee is:

Home Office Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Fax Number: _____

Home Renovations

6. Except as provided in paragraph 19, the Employee is responsible for any costs associated with home renovations required for a home office, including physical installation of phone lines and electrical upgrades.

Safety

7. The Employee agrees to maintain a designated workspace that meets the department's normal workplace occupational health and safety standards for the home office. A safety checklist, completed by the Employee, must be attached to this agreement.

8. The Employee agrees to promptly report all work-related accidents to the supervisor.

9. The Employee agrees that no business meetings will be held in the home office without specific approval of the supervisor.

On-site Visits

10. The Employee agrees to make the home office accessible for on-site visits by departmental representatives for safety inspections, accident investigation, equipment audits and other business-related matters upon 24 hours notice or less if agreed to by the Employee.

Insurance

11. The Employee agrees to carry a minimum of \$1,000,000 of general liability insurance. Costs associated with this coverage are the responsibility of the employee.
12. The Government of Alberta's insurance coverage does not extend to equipment owned by the Employee.

Family Responsibilities

13. The Employee agrees to have arrangements in place for regular dependent care.

Equipment

14. The department will provide equipment as follows: Item: _____ Serial #: _____

Use of Equipment

15. The Employee agrees to follow the department's policy on personal use of government equipment and software in the home office.

Security

16. The Employee must ensure all security guidelines and standards are followed. Security guidelines and standards include but are not limited to the following: physical and environmental security; data security; software security; communications security; computer viruses; and license agreements and copyright protection.

Technical Support

17. The department/Employee _____ will provide the service necessary for the installation, upgrading, maintenance and removal of hardware, software, virus protection and peripheral equipment.

18. The department will provide "help desk" services as follows: _____

Costs/Expenses

19. The department will supply or pay for the following costs and service charges associated with the home office (e.g., phone lines, internet e-mail, office supplies, courier, business-related long distance calls, network hook-up, modems and devices for security purposes).

20. All office-related expenses must be pre-authorized.

21. The department is not responsible for any costs not specified in this agreement.

Travel and Subsistence Expenses

22. The Employee is eligible for travelling and subsistence expenses acquired through travel authorized by the department as specified in the Public Service Subsistence, Travel and Moving Expenses Regulation.

23. The Employee is responsible for any costs associated with travel to the office, including trips to the office on any of the "home" workdays.

Termination of Agreement

24. This Agreement may be terminated by either party on 30 days written notice or earlier by mutual agreement.

25. Notwithstanding clause 24, this agreement automatically terminates when the Employee transfers to a new position.

Amendments

26. This Agreement may be amended by mutual agreement of the parties.

Additional Conditions (as agreed to by employee and supervisor)

The terms or termination of this Agreement are not subject to the grievance procedure for bargaining unit employees.

Employee: _____

Supervisor: _____

Human Resource Director: _____

A.U.P.E. Representative: _____



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Telecommuting in the Alberta Government

